

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY
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CNO WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 125914

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MNUC, OCLR, UK, US, PN, PQ

SUBJECT: BRITISH NPW TRANSIT OF PANAMA CANAL

1. BRITISH EMBASSY WASHINGTON HAS GIVEN US THE FOLLOWING
BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE PROPOSED INVITATION TO
GEN TORRIJOS TO BOARD HMS BLAKE AND THE NUCLEAR POWERED
SUBMARINE HMS CONQUERER WHILE THE ROYAL NAVY TASK FORCE
IS TRANSITING THE PANAMA CANAL IN JULY, 1978. WE UNDERSTAND
BRITISH EMBASSY PANAMA HAS DISCUSSED AN INVITATION TO BOARD
UNITS OF THE TASK FORCE, BUT HAS NOT SPECIFIED WHICH
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UNITS. GOP R SPONSE NOT KNOWN.

2. THE SCENARIO AS OUTLINED BY THE EMBASSY WOULD HAVE
BRITISH HELICOPTERS PICK UP TORRIJOS AND PARTY IN
PANAMANIAN TERRITORY, OVERFLY THE CANAL ZONE AND LAND
ONBOARD THE FLAGSHIP HMS BLAKE NEAR PEDRO MIGUEL. THE
BRITISH ADMIRAL AND THE TORRIJOS PARTY WOULD THEN HELO

TO HMS CONQUERER AND REMAIN ABOARD THE SUBMARINE FOR ABOUT ONE HOUR WHILE IT TRANSITED THE LOCK AT MIRAFLORES. THE OFFICIAL PARTY WOULD THEN HELO BACK TO BLAKE, WHICH WOULD THEN BE IN GATUN LAKE, FOR LUNCHEON ABOARD THE FLAGSHIP. THE BRITISH INTEND TO INCLUDE SENIOR AMERICAN MILITARY OFFICIALS IN THE LUNCHEON PARTY ON THE FLAGSHIP. AFTER LUNCH, THE PANAMANIAN PARTY WOULD BE FLOWN BACK TO

PANAMANIAN TERRITORY BY ROYAL NAVY HELICOPTER.

3. DEPARTMENT IS PLEASED TO HAVE THE BRITISH TASK FORCE AND THE NUCLEAR POWERED SUBMARINE TRANSITING THE CANAL. THE US NAVY HAS EXPRESSED RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE WISDOM OF DRAWING UNNECESSARY ATTENTION TO THE FIRST FOREIGN NPW TRANSIT BY THE TORRIJOS VISIT AND THE ATTENDANT PUBLICITY. IN ADDITION NAVY IS CONCERNED THAT THE TORRIJOS EMBARKATION FOCUS PANAMANIAN ANTI-TREATY OR ANTI-TORRIJOS SENTIMENT ON THE NPW, WHICH HAS UP TO NOW NOT BEEN A CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE. NAVY DOES NOT OPPOSE THE VISIT TO THE FLAGSHIP, NOR EVEN A VISIT TO CONQUERER IF IT IS IN THE CONTEXT OF OTHER VISITS AND NOT A SPECIAL HIGHLIGHTING OF THE NPW.

4. WE REQUEST THAT YOU TOUCH BASE WITH THE BRITISH EMBASSY IN PANAMA, THE PANAMA CANAL COMPANY, AND SOUTHCOM, AS NECESSARY, TO OBTAIN
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DETAILS OF THE BRITISH VISIT SCENARIO. WE SEEK EMBASSY VIEWS ON THE BRITISH NPW EMBARKATION PLAN, IN GENERAL AND SPECIFICALLY ON THE FOLLOWING POINTS: FIRST IS THERE LIKELY TO BE ADVERSE PANAMANIAN POLITICAL REACTION TO THE NPW TRANSIT ESPECIALLY WITH THE PROMINENCE GIVEN IT BY THE TORRIJOS VISIT? SECOND, WOULD THE TORRIJOS EMBARKATION IN THE CANAL ZONE CREATE ANY PROTOCOL PROBLEMS? AN EARLY REPLY WOULD BE APPRECIATED.
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